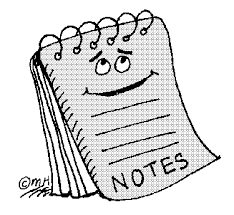
**2.5 From Anecdote to Reflective Essay**

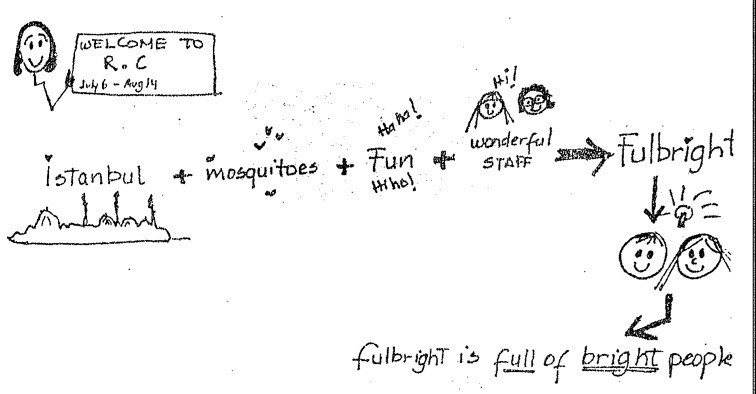
Like the anecdote, a reflective essay builds on personal observations and insights about important life experiences such as study, travel, internships, volunteering, personal growth, social action, religious or mystical encounters, and other meaningful projects or life events. Because of the reflective essay’s greater length, the implications of these experiences can be explored and evaluated in much greater depth. The different types of anecdotes we have explored in this chapter can be combined in one essay to more fully describe and explain the possible meanings and influences of particular episodes, turning points, undertakings, or seasons in our lives.



**2.5.1 Reading and Analyzing Aysel’s Reflective Essay**. We’ve read Aysel’s brief anecdote. Now, let’s read and analyze her longer reflective essay called “Where East Meets West.”

**Where East Meets West**

**Reflection on my Fulbright Summer Seminar**

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Istanbul has two souls, just like me. The narrow water of the Bosphorus Strait divides my home into the only major city straddling two continents: Asia and Europe. Imagine a situation in which your personality and place could change so drastically in just twenty minutes. In my Asian home, whenever I wasn’t doing homework, I was spending every moment with my family and friends, savoring everything and everyone that makes me what I already am. That was me on the weekends. Then a ferry boat ride took me across the Bosphorus to my European world as I completed high school at Robert College with the exciting promise of my future self and new possibilities as I gained special friends and mentors I will never forget. After becoming an English instructor at a technological school where my family lived, that second self was feeling adventurous again and pushed me to apply and get accepted for the Fulbright Summer Seminar, to be held once more over on the other side of the Bosphorus on the same grounds as my old school, Robert College. This time the ferry left me for the entire summer, no trips back and forth.

**Learning from Each Other**

We were 100 unique souls from all over Turkey and the United States. Some of the Americans had taken a summer break from their Fulbright teaching assignments in other countries to be able to participate in this special seminar. The central focus of our summer was EFL, English as a foreign language teaching, in all its many forms: language, literature, writing, science and the humanities. We instructors from Turkey were interested in English and American culture; those from the United States in Turkish and Turkish culture. We all worked together on various committees, including drama, sports, film, methodology, and more! Mine we called CASH: culture, arts, social events, and history. We thought the acronym suggests the idea of the important assets of “cultural capital.” More on CASH later. First, I want to describe a lesson plan our Istanbul-Asia team developed as one of the top submissions for a contest put together by the Methodology Committee.

**One of our Projects**

Our team called our activity “Interactive Writing.” Here’s how it works. The focus of the lesson is a brief one-page, high-interest article about any topic—science, history, literature, culture, etc. First, the instructor asks the students to read the article once without stopping (three minutes). Then students read it again, this time underlining, circling, highlighting online, or taking notes (seven minutes). Next the instructor asks the students to do a 20 minute “quick write” by very briefly summarizing the main ideas of the article in one paragraph, then adding one more paragraph writing anything they would like about the article, either in terms of its content or its style of writing. Here are some prompts we came up with to give ideas for that second paragraph:

\*This article makes me think about one of the following: a related topic, one of my own experiences, another way of looking at this issue, something perhaps connected but in a completely different way, etc.

\*I notice some very interesting aspects of writing style such as language, vocabulary, description, metaphorical symbols, sentence structure, style and organization, etc.

\*I’m drawn to aspects of the article in terms of the people, cultural aspects, geography, or other interesting information.

\*I agree, disagree, or both agree & disagree with what the author says about…

For a 50-minute class, there will be about 20 minutes left. At this point the interaction moves from internal to external. Students pair up with a classmate to do the following. They take turns reading the summary paragraph to see which ideas were the most important for each of them. After piloting this activity, students told us they were often very surprised about which ideas they had each chosen to summarize. Sometimes, there were spirited discussions about whether a partner’s summary correctly caught the meaning of the author of the article. Similarly, the second paragraph would often stimulate further discussion as partners would often say things like, “I don’t understand this word/concept. Why did you say that? Tell me more about what you mean. I’ve had a similar experience or one much different than yours.”

There are different ways this activity can be tweaked. For example, highlighting, note-taking, summarizing, and writing can all be carried out online or with students’ personal digital devices. In addition, the difficulty level of the article can be adjusted from beginning, intermediate, to advanced. Or the article can be read bilingually, having students read both a Turkish and an English translation. In another twist, a listening comprehension dimension can be added, the instructor reading the article out loud, clearly and not too fast, the students not seeing the print copy but instead taking notes when the instructor strategically pauses from time to time. With this approach, when student pairs check their summary paragraph, they can help each other piece together the main ideas, one partner having understood or heard something that the other missed. Finally, short quizzes can easily be devised about the original reading or response essays written by the students themselves: true/false, multiple-choice, short answer, cloze (students fill in a reading that has key vocabulary left out every other line), punctuation (students fill in a reading that has the punctuation removed).

**Conversation at a Turkish Coffeehouse**

But back to CASH. We stole one of the American guys, Ray, from the Sports Committee, telling him that CASH was much more fascinating than their table tennis, volleyball, and backgammon tournaments. He liked helping us with our committee’s cultural outings and enjoyed our group’s weekly coffeehouse conversations, visiting a different location each time.

“I like this place, Aysel, homey, everybody talking, like coffee and pancakes at an Oklahoma small-town diner. But the coffee cups seem way too small.”

“Oh, by the way there is a special name for them: *fincan.*  But you’ll see. Turkish coffee is very powerful. And the process is very soulful. No machines or filters. All natural. Watch how your server puts the coffee, ultra fine, in that little copper *cezve* coffee pot with the long handle? He’ll slowly let the water heat up until you have wonderful golden brown creamy stuff on the top.”

“Okayyy…maybe we can try some Hookah too like those guys over there?”

“No this is a working meeting. We need to plan our costume party. But what did you think about the Sufi Whirling Dervishes last night?”

“Very intense, very moving! But at first I thought it was going to be completely boring when that very old, decrepit-looking gentleman slowly walked onto the stage with a funny-looking guitar.”

“Baglama.”

“Okay, baglama, you’re starting to overload me with Turkish terms. Anyway he started playing, just this simple old man and strange instrument, but I have to tell you, I’ve never heard such sweet, powerful music. Sometimes I felt something like a deep joy and sometimes deep sorrow.”

“Maybe you could become a Sufi Baptist?”

“Maybe so,” Ray chuckled, “I’ve read that John the Baptist’s bones were discovered not far away in Sofia.”

“Really? I forget sometimes you Baptists have prophets too. Okay, now turn over your fincan, your little coffee cup, and I’ll read your leftover coffee grounds: Could be a tree, the tree of life, maybe those lighter particles that look like cherry blossoms, your future children?”

**An Unforgettable Costume Party**

It was really special for me to be able to share with Ray and the other Americans and my new Turkish friends the historical and cultural places of our ancient Istanbul. And the costume party, the final event of the summer, was a wonderful and unforgettable evening. Although at first no one seemed to be taking the costume party seriously, it turned out to be such a success. The party itself was great but the time spent for the preparations was even more fun. Everyone was running up and down trying to find a wig, a hat, a fan or even an artificial mustache. The party started at eight o’clock when people began to show up in amazing costumes. Then we had to use our imagination and ability to guess who was who. And it was a hard job. You couldn’t even be sure of the sex of some of the guests. There was a Japanese princess, a boy from Arabia, a tourist, an Italian, a sheik with his harem (including a guy in rainbow feather wings and cape), a bride and a groom, Minnie Mouse, some gypsies, Turkish peasants, and Ray in a Ponca tribal headdress from his native Oklahoma. Our jury had great difficulty deciding which costume was best. As a committee member, Ray was disqualified from consideration. He placed his vote for his ping pong friend, Ömer. In the end, Ömer K. as the sheik and his exotic harem were all chosen for third place. Hülya Özcan as the Japanese princess took second place. Kerry McKeown and Terry Williams as Turkish peasants won first place. It’s a Turkish custom to honor foreign guests, but Kerry and Terry looked quite authentic.

Aysel Okur